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Reasons for Deterioration of Historical Buildings and the Significance of Memory in the Adaptive Reuse Process of Architectural Heritage: Case Study of Saint Vincent de Paul School in Istanbul

Powody niszczenia zabytków i znaczenie pamięci w procesie adaptacji dziedzictwa historycznego. Studium przypadku zespołu Szkoły im. św. Wincentego a Paulo w Stambule

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Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo, zmiana użytkownika, zmiana funkcji, adaptacja, pamięć

Introduction

Cultural heritage objects can be defined as the legacy and the sum of the tangible and intangible values of the previous generations. Therefore, one of the most convenient ways to evaluate heritage is by assessing the values they represent. As it is stated by Avrami et al. [2019, p. 1], the evaluation of cultural heritage, which is based on values, retains the cultural significance of places and balances the aesthetic, historic, scientific, spiritual, and social values held by them. Hence, heritage objects do not only reflect the values, but they also provide information about the societies in which they were inherited. However, especially in the case of architectural heritage, it can be noticed that tangible characteristics are more likely to be acknowledged rather than intangible qualities, even though they can be defined as a part of the cultural reference system in societies.

The connection between architectural heritage and cultural reference was first mentioned at the Granada

Convention of 1985. After being opened for signature, it has been brought into force in thirty-two countries from a total of forty-three Member States of the Council of Europe [Pickard 2002, pp. 349–363]. In this convention, the Council of Europe attempted to outline the legislative measures and policies to protect and safeguard architectural heritage in European states, which would fulfil certain minimum conditions [Pickard 2001, p. 1]. It contained topics on the definition of architectural heritage, the identification of properties to be protected, statutory protection procedures, ancillary measures, sanctions, conservation policies, participation and associations, information and training and European coordination of conservation policies. Different approaches and measures were supposed to be adopted due to the need for one single category or other levels of protection in the implementation process. Furthermore, it included recommendations regarding the conservation of the architectural heritage as a component of town planning, the submission of legal protection procedures for demolition, reconstruction

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and adaptive reuse of heritage sites, limitation of public access as a conservation measure when it is required and the training of technical personnel, but at the same time the public in traditional crafts and technical assistance and exchange of information if it is needed by the public. All these measures were the intended outcome of the convention. However, the aim of the document was the part where the concept of cultural reference was mentioned. It was asserted that the aim of the document was to recall the importance of handing down to future generations a system of cultural references which can foster economic, social and cultural development. Cultural reference in cultural psychology is defined as every item or event related to other items or events in a cultural field. Together, they establish the cultural reference system containing the information [Boesch 2001, pp. 479–483]. Therefore, every site can be a cultural reference due to how it is connected to the scheme of more significant events. Since architecture is commonly recognized for its communicative and physical peculiarities, it might be possible to assign the role of cultural reference to architectural structures as well. Analyzing architectural heritage as a cultural reference can provide information about different aspects of the analyzed culture, not only regarding the existing one but also the existing cultural groups and traditions. It is essential to recognize that the intangible quality of architectural heritage is as important as its tangible values, and it can be used as a source of information about the living conditions of a society.

However, sometimes technological developments, new living conditions and lifestyles emerge in societies, which may lead to changes in historical buildings with the intention of protecting them from demolition [Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich 2020, pp. 85–96]. Therefore, to facilitate continuity, the structures sometimes need to react and adapt to the changing context of the environment and society in a coherent manner. This process can be achieved through physical preservation or restoration and with adaptive reuse of these structures. However, as Bottero et al. [2019, pp. 785–802] stated, sometimes the changes made by these projects can require compromise, and they can be a trade-off between adding an attractive function to a building and causing damage to the *genius loci*. Therefore, as Throsby [2012, p. 45–74] stated, the process should ensure that the benefits would involve the heritage itself. Still, at the same time, it should also be in the interest of the members of the society of the present generation. In that regard, the process needs to be conducted very carefully.

Cultural heritage forms the identity, culture and history of particular states, nations, local communities and societies [Kozień 2020, p. 7]. Therefore, the changes in these structures might have a direct impact on the perception of society. For example, when the use of a historical building is changed, it can affect the design scheme of the building, but also it can affect its authenticity as well. However, it might not only be the use change; user changes can also affect historical

buildings. Even though the use stays similar to the original, the expectations of new or different users can be dissimilar. This can cause operational problems that can result in damage or deterioration of the building.

To understand the various reasons which can cause deterioration in the lifespan of historical buildings, an analysis was performed on the St. Vincent de Paul French School Complex in Istanbul, Turkey. The St. Vincent de Paul French School Complex, which is an educational building located in the Bağlarbaşı neighborhood of Üsküdar, was built in 1883. However, due to the circumstances of the time related to the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the original users of the building departed from this area of Istanbul, and the building had various users until 2013. In 2013, the building was restored by the Municipality of Üsküdar. This research aims to analyze the positive and negative aspects of the latest restoration project.

Effects of user and use changes on structures

Buildings of cultural and historical value are among the most tangible physical references that convey information about the past. Therefore, preserving cultural assets by utilizing them with the approach of restoration or adaptive reuse would be a beneficial proposal for conserving these structures. Furthermore, it is a more sustainable approach due to using the existing building stock rather than constructing a new structure [Doğan 2019, pp. 430–443]. In addition to contributing to economic and environmental sustainability, restoration and adaptive reuse can positively affect socio-cultural sustainability. Transferring cultural knowledge to future generations is considered a social responsibility and a conscious necessity for progress. However, utilizing existing buildings by changing their users or use does not always happen with projects prepared by experts.

According to Şen and Dişli [2022, pp. 71–88], new uses can add new spaces to structures. Especially, unconscious changes performed by the users and the interventions added to the historical buildings by the new users, due to the required function of the building, can cause significant damage. As Rabun and Kelso [2009, pp. 1–2] stated, a change in the use of a historic building must be evaluated from both the exterior and the interior, and its assessment must be done in a comprehensive manner. Repairs implemented without sufficient research on the buildings are a common practice, mainly if the process is not controlled. For example, minor repairs such as paint renewal or repairing the plaster in the interior are frequently carried out without permission. However, even though they might be perceived as minor changes, they can cause the loss of architectural details, which can be a reference. Therefore, it is essential to be cautious in preserving the architectural, spatial and decorative features of the historical buildings.

On the other hand, predominantly residential and industrial buildings can contain many technical and architectural details related to their original function. Therefore, in the process of giving a new function to the building, its compatibility needs to be analyzed carefully. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that cultural heritage buildings can only host certain uses and that these uses are closely related to the potential of the buildings. Therefore, the new use should preserve and enrich the spatial qualities.

However, cultural heritage contains not only tangible qualities with its spatial features but also intangible qualities, which make the structures valuable for preservation. These intrinsic values can be regarded as one of the most discussed topics in contemporary heritage theory [Girard et al. 2019, pp. 5–42; Gravagnuolo et al. 2018, pp. 28–31]. As it is stated by Roszczyńska-Kurasińska et al. [2021], intrinsic value measurement is required in cultural heritage adaptive reuse projects due to its impact on the perception of society. Furthermore, to understand the importance of the structure for the local community and the residents who inhabit them [Roszczyńska-Kurasińska et al. 2021, pp. 5078–5093]. However, it is possible to state that, in most cases, the intangible characteristic of the heritage is disregarded when a new use is given. A cultural heritage site has the ability to establish a narrative for society, and any use change can affect this narrative and its reflection in the memories of the people.

Even though similar functions are given to the buildings, some of the adaptive reuse and restoration decisions made due to the change of users can affect the main characteristics of a building, which can directly change the quality of being as a cultural reference. In that regard, the St. Vincent de Paul French School in Istanbul is analyzed as a case study to identify the positive and negative aspects and the outcomes of changes.

Case study: St. Vincent de Paul French School Complex

History

During the Ottoman period, most of the residents of the district of Bağlarbaşı in Istanbul were from the empire's non-Muslim citizens, such as Armenian, Greek and Jewish communities. Some of these communities picked this area by choice. On the other hand, others were settled in this area by the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 1). However, without regard to the reason, the non-Muslim community created its own environment in this district, which involved structures with various functions according to their requirements, such as religious, cultural and social service buildings.

Especially after the reform edicts of 1839 and 1856, the number of foreign citizens who decided to come to the Ottoman Empire and who launched schools in its lands gradually increased. In 1839, 40 French schools started to work in Istanbul alone, 21 of which were for

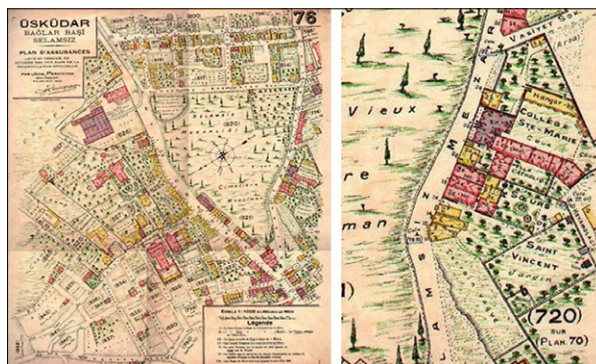


Fig. 1. The map of the area and the site plan of the school complex in J. Pervititch's maps from 1930

Ryc. 1. Mapa obszaru oraz zagospodarowanie działki zespołu szkolnego na mapach J. Pervititcha z 1930 r.



Fig. 2. Photograph of the front facade from the book of Nuretina Polvan (1952)

Ryc. 2. Zdjęcie elewacji frontowej z książki Nuretina Polvana (1952)

boys and 19 for girls [Sezer 1999, pp. 81–82]. In addition to these schools, which were run by priests and nuns, there were many other buildings that emerged in Istanbul during this period, such as churches, monasteries, hospitals, workshops for art, and missionary houses. Maronite, Greek Catholic, Chaldean, Greek Orthodox, Syriac, Armenian, Bulgarian, Latin and Jewish communities preferred their children to study in these foreign schools [Mutlu 2005, pp. 146–147]. In that regard, the dense non-Muslim population in the Bağlarbaşı region is thought to have played an essential role in the Filles de la Charité nuns' choice of this area for their new educational structure.

The Filles de la Charité nuns, also known as Sœurs Saint Vincent, first opened a school in Bağlarbaşı in 1859, which involved both a daytime section and a dormitory for the young children. However, this first school was closed in 1860 due to the tension between the Ottoman and French governments, which was related to the events in Syria. Therefore, even though this first school is mentioned in various historical documents, its exact location is unknown.

In 1883, the nuns returned to the Bağlarbaşı district of Istanbul again and rented a wooden house to start



Fig. 3. Plans of the school complex in 1883 and 1908 according to restitution projects; by H.A. Doğan
Ryc. 3. Rzuty zespołu szkolnego w latach 1883 i 1908, na podstawie projektów rewaloryzacyjnych; opr. H.A. Doğan

another school for orphan children. In the same year, the nuns acquired a brick building to accommodate the school, which is the case study of this research (Fig. 2).

According to the certificate, which was found in the Ottoman Archives, due to not having enough space in this brick building, one brick and two wooden structures were added in 1908 to the backyard of it. The school was listed in the list of French institutions in Istanbul by the Ottoman-French reconciliation signed in 1913. The same document stated that the school included a convent, church, boarding and day school, workshops and dispensary departments [Polvan 1952, pp. 176–177]. Furthermore, it is stated in various sources that the school had 120 female students when it was first opened in 1883 [Polvan 1952, pp. 177–178; Belin 1894, p. 468–469]. However, during the First World War, the school had to close again. In this period, while the nuns left with some students and returned to France, the priest of the chapel stayed in Istanbul. According to the Necip Bey maps from 1918, the building accommodated the police station of the district in this period. However, when the history of the police station is investigated, there is no information found regarding moving to this building around those dates.

On September 17, 1919, the St. Vincent de Paul French School opened again with 250 students. However, being away from the school for four years caused the need for significant repairs to the building, specifically on its roof and the dormitory section. Even though these repairs were conducted, there was also the need for some reinforcements in the building, and the limited budget of the nuns made the efforts insufficient after a certain period of time. Therefore, in 1924 the nuns closed the school, left Bağlarbaşı and withdrew from the Anatolian side of the city [Marmara 2009, pp. 131–132].

After the nuns, who were the first users of the school building, left the structure, it stayed vacant for twenty-eight years without any user. During this period, François Xavier Lobry, the French national who is listed as the owner of the building on the documents, also did not have any connection with the building, nor did he visit it. Therefore, in 1952, a trustee was appointed on his behalf for the administration of the immovable property by the Turkish government. After the expiry of the ten-year legal period, in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Code, the owner was decided to be absent with the decision dated 1965. After this date, the building was registered in the name of the state treasury in 1967. In all this period, with the changes in ownership as well, the structure stayed abandoned without a user or a function for forty-three years. After the building was registered with the treasury, people who had recently immigrated to Istanbul were located in the building complex. Various users lived there until the building started to collapse in 1994.

According to a document dated to June 14, 1994, which is in the file of the building at the Regional Directorate of Foundations, it is stated that two of the five tenants left the building after a particular part of it collapsed. Subsequently, the remaining three tenants were notified to leave the building. As a result of the lack of adequate maintenance by the families living in them, the structures became dilapidated. Some of the wooden floors collapsed in 1994, and after a while, it was left completely empty and abandoned once again. The floors of the building collapsed completely, and a large part of the roof collapsed over some time. In 2005, a fire broke out in the neighboring building, which caused the roof of the chapel in the backyard to collapse as well [Nardereleli 2008, pp. 131–132].



Fig. 4. Front facade of the building, 2009; photo by H.A. Doğan
Ryc. 4. Elewacja frontowa budynku, 2009; fot. H.A. Doğan

The building complex stayed abandoned until 2011. Between 2011 and 2013, a restoration project of the building was prepared and later on, an extensive restoration was performed. The last function and user change occurred after the restoration. Currently, the building is used as a private educational institution, which provides workshops and training for women, such as language courses, baking courses, sewing courses, first aid classes, etc.

Deterioration over time

The changing conditions over time and the new demands that arise accordingly tend to lead to the devaluation and deterioration of historical buildings. The first deterioration in the main building occurred during its occupancy by the nuns, who were the first owners. The increasing number of students over the years made it necessary for the nuns to build new structures in the backyard as an extension. Three buildings were added in the backyard in 1908, which led to changes in the planning scheme of the building to provide circulation between the new buildings and the main building (Fig. 3).

Some niches and windows were converted into doors, the room on the first floor of the main building was divided, and a corridor was constructed to connect

the building to the wooden structure built in the backyard. In addition, bathrooms were built on the first and second floors between the main building and the new brick building due to the insufficiency of the existing bathrooms. Therefore, the adjacently built structures caused damage to the rear facade of the main building. However, it might also be possible to state that it was not only the impact of the additions but also the increase in the number of students that indirectly affected the design of the building.

Nevertheless, one of the main reasons for the physical deterioration of the building was related to the structure staying vacant for a long time. The building material could not be protected with the necessary repairs during this period. Especially after the roofs of the buildings collapsed, this process accelerated even more, and all the walls of the building were directly exposed to natural conditions. The floors inside the building collapsed, and the partition walls were damaged. Only the roof on the entrance axis of the main building and the roof of the chapel existed in 2005. The upper floor slabs on this axis survived until the restoration of the building started.

The door and window openings on the front facade of the building were removed and closed with bricks to prevent homeless and addicted people from entering the building (Fig. 4). The wooden structures in the backyard of the main building disappeared entirely due to neglect and natural conditions.

According to the photographs found in the personal archives of Nezhil Uzel, the first floor of the chapel existed until the late 1980s. The ground floor of the chapel was used with its original function until the nuns left the building. However, the first floor was divided into smaller rooms during the changes of 1908, and this floor started to be used as an extra living space. The frescos on the ground floor were affected by the weather conditions even when the first floor existed (Fig. 5). However, the deterioration aggravated after the first floor and the roof collapsed.

When the researcher Nezhil Uzel took photographs of the building complex and specifically the chapel, there were still some traces of the nuns who used to live in these buildings (Fig. 6). Therefore, it creates the



Fig. 5. Interior of the chapel in the 1980s, from the archives of Nezhil Uzel, and in 2009, by H.A. Doğan
Ryc. 5. Wnętrze kaplicy w latach osiemdziesiątych XX w., z archiwum Neziha Uzela, oraz w 2009 r., fot. H.A. Doğan



Fig. 6. The pieces of paper found by Nezih Uzel; photos by Nezih Uzel
 Ryc. 6. Kartki papieru znalezione przez Neziha Uzela; fot. Nezih Uzel



Fig. 7. Traces of the wooden structures at the rear facade of the main building; photo by H.A. Doğan
 Ryc. 7. Ślady obiektów drewnianych przy tylnej elewacji budynku głównego; fot. H.A. Doğan

impression that when the main building and the other small buildings were occupied by the tenants, the chapel was not used for any function and was left without any maintenance.

However, it was not only the factors that directly affected the building complex itself, but the environmental changes have also caused the building to lose its original value. When the building was first built, there was no dense construction around it, but today there are reinforced concrete buildings on both sides of the main building and next to the chapel, which blocked the northeast facade of the chapel and blocked its windows completely.

Evaluation of the Restoration and Adaptive Reuse Decisions of the Building Complex

Even though the expertise reports of June 1994 suggested demolishing and reconstructing the building, since it was thought that it might not be possible to restore the building, the commission for the preservation of cultural heritage decided to protect the building the way it had been in the very same month. When the preparation of the restitution and restoration projects began, the school complex consisted of the main building, the chapel and the added brick building, and the wooden structures no longer existed at the time (Fig. 7). It was possible to fol-

converted into their original functions. In that regard, it might be possible to state that in the restoration of the building, the restitution of 1883 and the restitution of 1908 were combined for having the most efficient space (Fig. 8).

For the construction of the new door and window frames, wooden material was used. Furthermore, the original divisions and details were implemented, which were prepared in the restitution projects by the photographs. The width of the frames was constructed relatively thick for the windows so that there would be the possibility to fit double-glazed panes. By using double-glazed panes, it was aimed to achieve thermal comfort in the buildings. However, no extra insulation was added to the main walls, which does not allow the building to be within the standards of the new structures.

On the other hand, some other regulations for modern construction are also not followed in the building complex. First of all, since there are steps for entering the main building from the front and back facades, there is no easy access for disabled people. Furthermore, even though they can access the ground floor somehow, there is no additional lift inside or outside the main building, which would allow them to go to the upper floors. Moreover, there are no toilets for people with disabilities either. Therefore, the layout is not designed for people with disabilities.

When the restoration of the building was completed, a new educational institution was moved to the structure. Since the original use of the building was an educational institution itself, the new function fit into the functional scheme of the structure well. Therefore, in the restoration process, Article 5 of the Venice Charter (1964) was followed, which states that the conservation should be implemented within the limits that the modifications would not affect the layout of the structure. Furthermore, it partly followed Article 12; in the same charter, which asserts that the replacements of missing parts should be integrated harmoniously with the whole by following the restitution project.

However, some of the restoration decisions were also found to conflict with the same article. For exam-

ple, even though there was enough evidence regarding the chapel in the backyard of the building, which is a part of the complex, it was not restored during the last restoration in 2013 (Fig. 9). The chapel structures are one of the most common elements of the Istanbul non-Muslim schools built in the nineteenth century. Therefore, the decision regarding not to restore the chapel can affect the cultural and architectural reference of the building. However, in Article 12, it is stated that the restoration should not falsify artistic or historical evidence.

In Article 14, it is explained that the sites of monuments must be the object of special care to safeguard their integrity. Therefore, the decision not to restore the chapel also affects the integrity of the complex. Furthermore, there were no consolidation approaches implemented to the structure. As a result, the decision not only damages the building itself, but the abandoned existence of the building also influences the perception of the building and the environment.

Moreover, the sign at the entrance of the building, which used to state that it was a French school, is also removed from the facade (Fig. 10). Deleting the sign of the French school has a direct effect on the cultural memory of the neighborhood. The building used to be known as the French school in the district for many years. However, the change of the sign would make this forgotten by the new generations.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage can be regarded as a subjective matter to some extent due to the narrative it establishes for the people who live in the same environment as the heritage site. However, its protection not only affects the people of the area, but also it can have an impact on humanity since heritage sites are cultural references as well. Therefore, in their restoration, one of the fundamental approaches to be followed should be evaluating them as information resources about that society and focusing on preserving their intangible values. By doing so, it is not only the intangible value which is pre-



Fig. 10. The sign on top of the entrance – before and after the restoration; photo by H.A. Doğan
Ryc. 10. Znak nad wejściem – przed i po rewaloryzacji; fot. H.A. Doğan

served but also the material characteristics of the site which become a testimony.

From time to time, it is common to notice that some heritage sites are not maintained due to complicated political and social reasons. Even if they are restored, the characteristics that make the site different from others are removed or changed. However, these sites require special attention and an effort to shape the narrative and identify the broader set of related cultural references. Therefore it can establish a relationship between the object and the present society.

One of the leading causes for the deterioration of architectural heritage is the need for the maintenance of their structure over the years, which would cause the heritage site to be exposed to natural effects. In that regard, restoration and adaptive reuse are used as a practice to preserve the continuity of these heritage sites. However, the change in the user or the use can escalate the deterioration if the decisions in this process are not determined well due to the characteristics of the individual building. Protecting the intangible values of historical buildings is currently still an underestimated aspect in many conservation projects.

When the restoration and adaptive reuse of the St. Vincent de Paul French School Complex are analyzed, it can be possible to state that, even though the new users and the new function selected for the structure

are compatible in theory, it has a negative impact on the intangible value of the building complex. While the restoration of the complex followed the practices and the rules of the Venice Charter in restoration, the sensitivity regarding the intrinsic value of the building can be considered disregarded. Therefore, even though the current restoration can assist the continuity of the building in the physical sense, it is believed that the neglect of the intangible values can establish the loss of the memories of the people in the distant future.

Furthermore, it can also be stated that, despite the change of function, the trace of the former use has remained; however, this was not reflected in the restoration of the building complex. Restoration of the chapel, even if it was not keeping its original function, could have added another functional space for the building complex and benefitted the environment. The abandoned and unused structures in the neighborhoods tend to cause safety issues and directly affect the perception of the environment. Additionally, it can affect the aspect of the building, which represents a cultural reference for the next generations. In that regard, in the process of restoration and adaptive reuse, it is crucial not only to protect the physical characteristics of the building but also the intangible values that the architectural heritage object contains.

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Abstract

Architectural heritage can deteriorate for various reasons related to human interventions or natural causes. Especially buildings constructed with materials such as brick and stone are more likely to experience a few user and use changes in their lifetimes, which would result in interventions. While some of the changes can be prepared and controlled by experts, some can happen without necessary supervision due to the long-term transformations and social dynamics. However, in both cases, it can cause damage to a building. Especially when a structure is the heritage of a different era or a different culture, and society has already changed, even the interventions performed by experts can be inappropriate. In this study, the restoration and adaptive reuse project of the St. Vincent de Paul French School in Istanbul was analyzed to gain insight into the reasons for its deterioration and to determine the outcomes of the project.

Streszczenie

Zabytki architektury mogą niszczyć z różnych powodów związanych z ludzką interwencją oraz czynnikami naturalnymi. Jest dość prawdopodobne, że budynki z cegły i kamienia przejdą w swoim życiu technicznym kilka zmian użytkownika oraz formy użytkowania, które to będą wiązały się z przebudowami. O ile niektóre zmiany mogą być przygotowane i nadzorowane przez ekspertów, o tyle inne mogą być przeprowadzone bez należytego nadzoru ze względu na długotrwałe przemiany i dynamikę społeczną. Niemniej w obu przypadkach zmiany te mogą doprowadzić do zniszczeń w budynku. Zwłaszcza zaś kiedy obiekt jest z innej epoki lub jest dziedzictwem innej kultury, a społeczeństwo zdążyło się już zmienić, nawet interwencje eksperckie mogą być niewłaściwe. W niniejszym badaniu przeanalizowano projekt zmiany sposobu użytkowania i przebudowy Szkoły Francuskiej im. św. Wincentego a Paulo w Stambule, aby zrozumieć przyczyny jej niszczenia oraz ustalić rezultat projektu.